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Title: Lights, camera, commitment: Mick Greenbank's 25 years as a Lab photographer

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Lights, camera, commitment: Mick Greenbank's 25 years as a Lab photographer

Mick Greenbank flips through a 3-ring binder as he sits in a TA-55 conference room, reminiscing about the nearly 25 years he's spent working as a LANL photographer. Paging through certificates, noteworthy letters and emails, and old lists of goals and tasks, he explains that he's stayed a TA-55 photographer for a quarter of a century because he "just wants to shoot." Over that time, he became known as a trustworthy and committed team player who's always ready to lend a camera-filled hand.

'New Mexico led me to photography'

Greenbank spends his days behind the fence at the Plutonium Facility (PF-4). He's known among his colleagues for being the go-to guy for classified photography, but his photography career was born out of a very different background – the Eagle Scouts.

From Ohio, Greenbank moved across the country working for Scout camps and ranches in his teen years, even being selected to go to Washington D.C. to represent the Scouts at the Bicentennial celebrations in 1976. It was when his staffer experience led him to Philmont Scout Ranch that he was introduced to the state of New Mexico. At Philmont, Greenbank had the opportunity to move his photography hobby into a paying gig as he became a staff photographer. Little did he know that this would propel him into an extraordinary – and unusual – career in photography.

“Scouting led me to New Mexico, and New Mexico led me to photography,” Greenbank said. “I started getting published in outdoor magazines and realized I could make a career of it, so I switched my major to photography and graduated with a fine arts degree in photography at Ohio University.”

Over the years, Greenbank developed film in dark rooms, sold cameras, did real estate photography (he may have taken the photos that ended up selling a house to Cher), and even worked as the manager of the Lensic Theatre in Santa Fe. He also worked as a director of photography for a startup design firm based in Santa Fe. Woven in through all of these branches of his budding career was moments of overlap with Los Alamos National Laboratory.

“My experience with the Lab goes back to the company I was a part of in the 80s with a small band of guys from Philmont,” Greenbank explains. “We did some contract work for the Lab, and through them I did the first LANL color picture calendar. I only did that project for a few years due to funding, but it was a cool way to start getting involved with Los Alamos.”

Translating artistry to government work



Greenbank photographs a glovebox at TA-55 in the late 90s.

Fast forward to 1993 when Greenbank officially started his career at LANL, first as a contractor and then as a full-time employee by 1995. At TA-55 from the very beginning, Mick brought a new set of skills to technical photography, and a new level of responsiveness to his customer base. He was able to apply his

artistry to shooting processes in PF-4, resulting in better, more usable photos. He understood how to use lighting and reflections in new ways.

“I was able to bring the outside world ideas in photography to government work, and that was a new approach at the time.”

Over the next 25 years at LANL, Greenbank would go on to learn the ins and outs of PF-4, manage the transition from film shooting to digital, photograph scientists from all over the world at plutonium science conferences, shoot and archive hundreds of thousands of photos, mentor handfuls of new career Lab employees, and even meet his wife!

Along the way, he’s learned to shoot photos in an extremely challenging and unusual environment inside PF-4, often documenting processes as workers perform them inside a glovebox, which are the safety containers where hazardous materials are worked with. Perhaps more important than anything – he’s been adaptable and committed, willing to get last-minute calls or wait around for hours in order to get the shot.

Commitment to customers

Ben Ebersole (PT-3) is one of Mick’s primary customers in PF-4. A product engineer with the Pit Technologies division, Ebersole and his team are the technical boots on the ground to oversee and troubleshoot the manufacturing cycle as well as capture data – often in the form of photos.

“We use photos of our processes for a lot of different reasons – showing the work to management, giving briefings, and collecting data,” Ebersole describes. “If there’s an anomaly in a product, or if a new process was particularly successful – we need to document all of that, and it’s much clearer to document with photos than with words.”

When Ebersole and his team members are going to perform a process that needs to be photographed, it’s often last minute – and he says that Greenbank is always at the ready.

“I like working with Mick because he’s really responsive and he understands that our schedule doesn’t often allow us to plan ahead. I’m always impressed by the techniques he applies – it’s really difficult to get a good shot in such a restrictive environment, but Mick and his teammates can always capture what we need.”

A robust team with remarkable customer service

Those teammates are the TA-55 media services team, which is a deployed branch of the Lab’s institutional media services, which recently moved into the Communications & External Affairs division. The team includes **Paul Kakert** (team lead), photographers **Carlos Trujillo**, **Shannan Winchell** and **Briana Salazar**, videographers **Brian Bingamon**, **David Tietmeyer**, and AV support specialist **Andres Maestas**.

“Mick was TA-55 media services before there even was a team,” Kakert says. “As our team was built over the last few years, it’s fair to say it was really molded around what Mick had been doing for the past few decades.”

Kakert describes that their team's approach to work at TA-55 is inspired by Mick's example of commitment to their customers.

"You can teach any photographer how to shoot back in PF-4, but it's harder to teach the importance of the customer relationship, and how to respect and enhance what Mick has developed over the years. Mick is fiercely dedicated to his customers, and he's passing that on to the rest of the team."

"Mick also helps us out by vouching for his new team members and gets his customers introduced to them – that dedication to collaboration and getting everyone involved has really been key for our team to grow."

The team has grown, as more and more of its members are providing media services with new levels of excellence, and in more robust ways. From gleaming training videos and animations to billboard-ready promotional photos to those essential national security process shots Greenbank has long worked on, new media is continually rolling out for customers all around ALDWP.

Overall, the team's work has improved the ALD's training, lessons learned in production, and even morale.

It didn't stop during the pandemic, as Greenbank and Trujillo came on site regularly to continue to capture the essential work happening there and around the community. Trujillo even became known for his Photoshop skills, taking photos of individual members of a group and editing them together for an otherwise impossible 2020 team photo!

During Greenbank's time working from home, he captured photos of how Covid-19 affected residents of Northern New Mexico in order to document the community impact for the Laboratory. Photos of empty grocery store shelves, virus testing lines, and masked-up residents will go into the LANL archive to add to the understanding of this era in history for future employees.

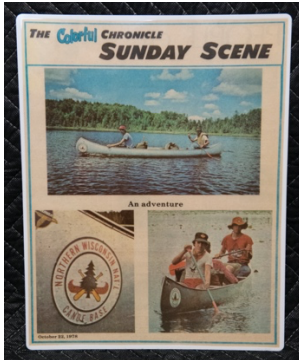
Adaptability makes a happy career

When Greenbank thinks about his career at LANL and the young photographers joining him in his work, he says there's one word that he wants to pass on: adaptability.

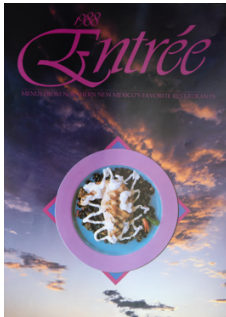
"Be adaptable. Things at the Lab can take a while, whether you're getting your computer fixed or going through your day to day. Do the best you can with what you have to work with, and set an example for your coworkers to do the same. Adapt, compromise, and deliver the best work you can."

Gallery/GIF: Some of Greenbank's best and favorite shots over the course of his photography career at LANL and beyond.

1. **1978: Greenbank's first time having a photo published was in an Ohio newspaper**



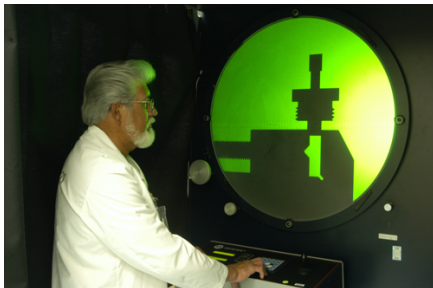
2. **1988: Covering a variety of topics, Greenbank's photos make the New Mexico restaurant scene**



3. **1989: The LANL calendar that first introduced Greenbank's photography skills to the Lab**



4. **Late 90s: Using an optical comparator to look at components in PF-4**



5. **Late 90s : The Isotope Fuels Impact Tester (IFIT)**



6. 1998: A rainbow over the Plutonium Facility



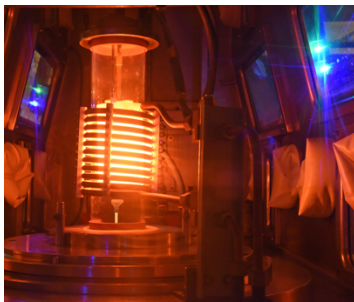
7. 2009: A plutonium plume



8. 2010: Closeup of the downdraft assembly process in PF-4



9. 2016: A fan favorite among TA-55 communications, a plutonium casting furnace at work.



10. 2019: Elle Stephan works with pit machining

